

Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SP-02 INR-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 L-01 IO-03 DPW-01 /041 W

----- 036220

R 051040Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2425

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

JCRC SAMAE SAN THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0834

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MOPS, MPOL, LA

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA

1. MILITARY ASSISTANCE. IN THE COURSE OF A MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA ON FEBRUARY 4, I MENTIONED TO HIM THAT THE PATHET LAO HAD APPROACHED THE MISSION AT VARIOUS LEVELS IN ORDER TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ON THE MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. I TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT I PLANNED TO MEET WITH LEADERS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE LATER THIS WEEK IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH A COMMON POSITION ON THIS ISSUE. I TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT WHEN THE MATTER HAD BEEN RAISED BY FONMIN PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, I HAD REPLIED THAT THIS WAS AN ISSUE FOR THE LAO TO RESOLVE AND HAD NOTED THAT IF U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO FAR WERE TO BE INCLUDED IN THE PGNU BUDGET, THE SAME SHOULD BE TRUE OF THE SUPPORT RECEIVED BY THE PATHET LAO FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. THE PRIME MINISTER ASSENTED TO THIS POSITION.

2. MIAS. I INFORMED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THE PGNU SHOULD ANTICIPATE FURTHER PRESSURE WITH REGARD TO THE MIA/POW ISSUE. THE PROBLEM OF OUR MISSING MEN IN INDOCHINA WAS BEING BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE NEW MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND I WAS SURE
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THAT THERE WAS WIDESPREAD DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THE PROGRESS MADE TO DATE. AS I HAVE ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, I URGED THAT SERIOUS

TALKS COMMENCE ON THIS SUBJECT DIRECTED TOWARD AGREEMENT ON THE INVESTIGATION OF CRASH SITES IN AREAS WHICH ARE NOT SENSITIVE. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION VERY WELL AND WOULD TAKE ACTION WHEN HE RETURNS TO VIENTIANE. COMMENT. I VERY MUCH DOUBT THAT THE PRIME MINISTER CAN INFLUENCE THE PACE OF EVENTS ON THE POW/MIA ISSUE BUT INTEND TO KEEP IT IN FRONT OF HIM.

3. DISTURBANCES. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION REGARDING THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN THE KINGDOM, I TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT IT APPEARED TO ME THAT SAYABOURY WOULD BE THE NEXT PROVINCE TO UNDERGO DEMONSTRATIONS AND DISTURBANCES. THE PRIME MINISTER WAS SURPRISED AND SAID HE HAD HEARD NOTHING ABOUT IT. I SAID THAT THE SITUATION WAS PRESENTLY CALM BUT THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT THERE WAS SERIOUS RESENTMENT OF THE CORRUPTION AND INCOMPETENCE OF THE GOVERNOR AND MILITARY COMMANDER. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT HE WAS AWARE OF SOME DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF THESE INDIVIDUALS. HE COMMENTED THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO TAKE EFFECTIVE ACTION AGAINST CORRUPTION AS THE MINISTERS WOULD NEVER PROVIDE HIM WITH FACTUAL INFORMATION ON WHICH HE COULD BASE A DECISION. I COMMENTED THAT THE WHOLE ISSUE OF CORRUPTION AND GHOSTS IN THE ARMY WAS GIVING US A LOT OF TROUBLE IN CONNECTION WITH THE TROOP REDUCTION EFFORT. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT THE ARMY WAS EVEN WORSE THAN THE CIVIL SERVICES. HE HAD A LONG TIME AGO DIRECTED THAT A SENSIBLE, PHASED DEMOBILIZATION PLAN BE PUT INTO EFFECT. WHEN HE RETURNED TO VIENTIANE HE WOULD CONVOKE THE GENERAL STAFF AND GET THIS SITUATION RESOLVED.

4. COMMENT: ALL OF THE ABOVE WAS VINTAGE SOUVANNA. ALTHOUGH PHYSICALLY UNCHANGED, HE APPEARED TO ME TO BE EXTRAORDINARILY OUT OF TOUCH WITH REALITY. IT WAS ALSO OBVIOUS FROM THE COMMENTS HE MADE ON THE DEAN CASE, AS WELL AS HIS COMMENTS ON CORRUPTION, THAT HE TENDS INCREASINGLY TO PARROT PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG WHO MADE REMARKS VERY SIMILAR TO THOSE OF SOUVANNA IN HIS SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEW (VIENTIANE 809).
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975VIENTI00834
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750042-0534
From: VIENTIANE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750268/aaaacjoh.tel
Line Count: 97
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <22 JUL 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA PHOUMA
TAGS: MASS, MOPS, MPOL, LA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006